

OBITUARY

GONZALO FIGUEROA GARCIA-HUIDOBRO

February 4, 1931 - May 20, 2008

It is with a great sense of loss and sadness that we now remember Gonzalo “Chalo” Figueroa, who was more than a mentor and model to me because of his commitment to Rapa Nui, but also a dear friend. Those were his only words, during a few seconds of consciousness, when I visited him some weeks before his departure.

It was more than twenty years of a deep relationship, which began soon after my first connection to Rapa Nui, through the Fonck Museum on the mainland, and then his invitation to participate in the second Norwegian Expedition in 1987. He was like a mythical figure because of his participation on the famous expedition in 1955 and his long-term dedication to Rapa Nui. I knew about his complex relationship with Thor Heyerdahl and his deep friendship with other two members of the expedition, William Mulloy and Arne Skjølsvold. I knew about Mulloy, thanks to Gonzalo — his great qualities as a person and as a scientist. His early departure was a terrible loss as well, something we can better appreciate from the distance now.

Committed, generous, a good friend, an aristocratic but unassuming gentleman who enjoyed life and who passionately searched for transcendence — these are some of the many values and concepts that characterized the complex and rich personality that was Gonzalo Figueroa. He was generous because he believed in people, even though he had been disappointed many times. Ultimately, the restoration of Ahu Tongariki was a painful experience — but, later on, we were able to participate in the Japan UNESCO project for the conservation of archaeological sites on the island and this felt like a brief return to the good old days.

Gonzalo was 24 years old when he joined the expedition that tied him to Rapa Nui forever, an expedition that brought him and colleagues to many sites across the Pacific and to Europe. Years later, in 1960, while representing the University of Chile, Gonzalo met William Mulloy — to work on the island again for the first systematic restoration, at Ahu Akivi.

The scientific report was published 18 years later, after Mulloy's death, yet their first paper was concerned not with academics but with politics: “Medidas a Fin de Salvar el Tesoro Arqueológico de la Isla de Pascua” (“Measures to Save the Archaeological Treasures of Easter Island”), *Boletín de la Universidad de Chile*, 1960.

Soon after, the island experienced the revolution that eventually brought citizenship to the Rapanui people, under a unique regulation unlike any from colony islands in the world: Ley Pascua (1966). As a result of this law, Rapanui land belongs to the Rapanui people only, tax-free, and, among other things, this law created a fund for the restoration of archaeological sites with money from the Casino in Viña del Mar. Gonzalo was in charge of the administration of some of these

funds for the restoration of the Tahai Complex, in 1967. Unfortunately, the article concerning these funds was eliminated from the Ley Pascua in 1974, and never replaced.

However, the period before this was very productive. Besides archaeology, Gonzalo (who was an honorary member of the Sociedad Chilena de Arqueología) dedicated his efforts to the conservation and management of the island. His report, with Eduardo Sanchez, to the Norwegian Expedition Scientific Volume in 1965 was about adzes, but his most important contribution was in politics. In 1966, along with William Mulloy, he produced for UNESCO the most comprehensive documentation on Rapa Nui archaeology and its management. Even though most of the proposals are dead letter, our National Council of Monuments recognized Gonzalo in 2003 because of his lifetime efforts.

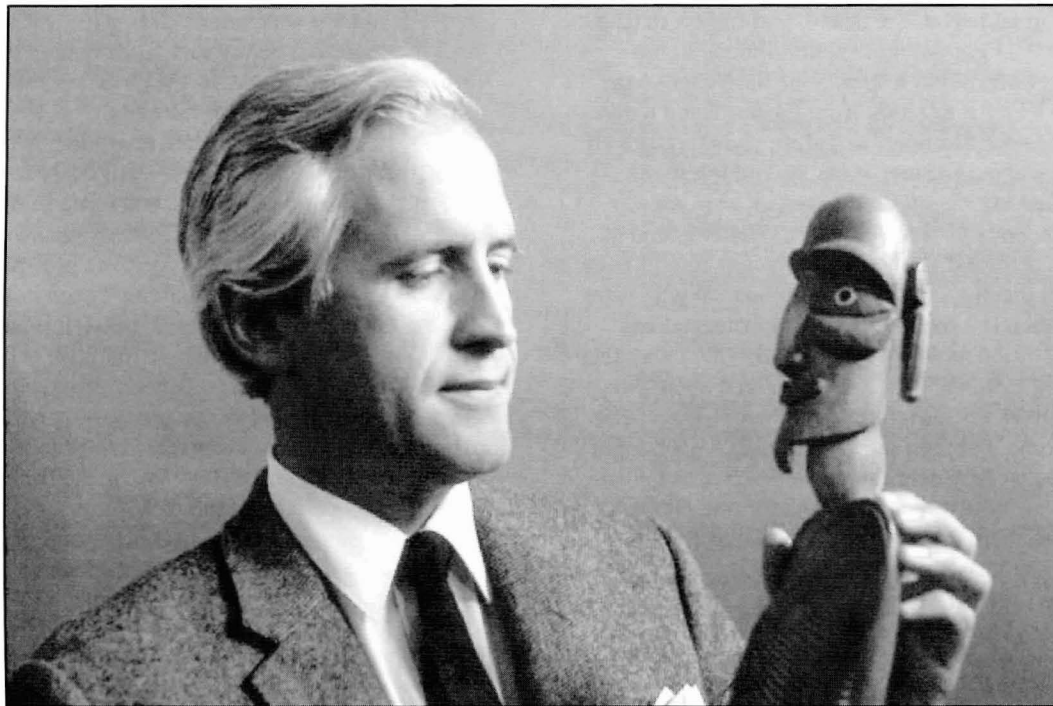
For many years, the Fundación del Pacífico and the Oficina de Planificación were Gonzalo's platforms to produce the policies and funds to support maintenance and management of the archaeological heritage on Easter Island. A new opportunity for a field season on the island came about in 1982, with his friend Arne Skjølsvold. They received a grant from the Kon Tiki Museum to excavate around the famous *moai* Tukururi (the kneeling statue they found on the periphery of the main Rano Raraku quarry in 1955). This new excavation was their way to return to the island's archaeology after so many years. Heyerdahl himself was involved in a long-term project to dig around Ahu Nau Nau, in 1986, 1987, and 1988 — but he had his own agenda (something about some “mystery solved...”).

Gonzalo was extremely polite and private about Heyerdahl. He respected him, so he never spoke of their differences in public. But Gonzalo was very happy about the Polynesian DNA we found in pre-Hispanic chicken bones from Southern Chile — the same we got from feathers he gave us from his Araucana chickens in Chena (his refuge outside Santiago). Gonzalo had many books and piles of documents and pictures which he asked me to organize after my stay of seven years on Easter Island. I will never forget those moments of joy while working with him in Chena. This was an excellent way to learn more about Rapa Nui and the man who loved and suffered from it the most — my dear friend Gonzalo. At least he was able, with his friend Arne, to visit Rapa Nui for the last time in 2004, during the VI International Conference on Rapa Nui and the Pacific held in Viña del Mar. Arne was already ill so it was their way to say, “Iorana, Rapa Nui”. Nice people, after all. *Moa toke te tangata*.

May we all remember Gonzalo as the warmest host in Chena, the well-known place for many Rapanui-philic like Georgia Lee, Emily and Brigid Mulloy, Chris Stevenson, Bill Ayres, Grant McCall, and others — as well as all of his many Rapanui friends.

And may this recognition help to console his family, his wife Maleca, and his children Diego, Antonia, and Santiago, and Monica, his Rapanui daughter.

— José Miguel Ramírez-Aliaga



GONZALO FIGUEROA GARCIA-HUIDOBRO (1931-2008)

A LOOK BACK

“REPORTING CALLING AT SALA-Y-GOMEZ AND EASTER ISLANDS”

With annotations by Shawn McLaughlin

The following is a report made by Commander Bouverie Clark to Rear-Admiral Algernon Lyons, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Navy, based on the late 19th century visit of the H.M.S. *Sappho* to Easter Island and first published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch* in 1899.

...

H.M.S. *Sappho*, at Sea, lat. 28° 01' S., long. 114° 02' W.,
20th June, 1882

Sir —

[1.] I have the honor to inform you that I touched at Easter Island in H.M. ship under my command on the passage from Coquimbo¹ to Pitcairn Island, and as the *Sappho* is the first English man-of-war that has visited the island since the *Topaze* was there in 1869 (as far as I can discover), and as it is much changed since then, I think it right to give you a detailed account of my visit.

2. Before arriving at Easter Island I sighted Sala-y-Gomez at midnight on the 13th, and thinking it desirable to examine it to search for wreckage, &c., I lay to till the morning when I steamed up to within half a mile of the lee side, but saw nothing except some very weather-beaten barks of timber that looked as if they had been there a long time. There was a heavy swell on, and landing did not appear at to be practicable anywhere without risk. Scott Reef was showing plainly, with occasional heavy breakers on it, and is a danger for any ship passing at night, especially as Sala-y-Gomez is so low that it would not show if very dark until close in.

3. Easter Island was sighted, distant about 30 miles, at daylight on the seventeenth day from Coquimbo (June 16th), and on getting up to the east end I intended to anchor off Mt. Topaze² for the night but as the south-west swell appeared to make the landing very bad, I gave up the idea and steamed round to Cook Bay [a/k/a Caleta Hanga Roa], where I anchored in the evening. In rounding Cape South-west [Hanga Ha-have?] I passed between Needle Rock³ and the mainland, and I may mention here that the passage, as well as the one between the two islands, is perfectly clear and free from all danger, with deep water in both. The high cliff which towers over you as you pass makes it a very striking and picturesque sight.

4. On passing the village of Malaveri [*sic*; Mataveri — more a region or gathering place of clans than a village *per se*] I was surprised to see the English flag hoisted on a lofty flag-staff, and shortly after anchoring, I was boarded by Mr. Alexander Salmon, the agent of the “Maison Brander” of Tahiti,